

2025 Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 44

BY REPRESENTATIVE LAFLEUR

A RESOLUTION

To express the condolences of the House of Representatives upon the death of Roena Isabelle Wilford.

WHEREAS, Roena Isabelle Wilford was the ninth child born to Louis Wendell Wilford and Mollie Jean Alexander Wilford; she was baptized at an early age under the leadership of Reverend R.L. Burden at Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Baton Rouge; and

WHEREAS, Roena's life was historically significant to the country and the Baton Rouge community; in 1956, she and four of her siblings were selected to be the first African American students to integrate the Baton Rouge public school system, and they were listed as plaintiffs in the Brown v. Board of Education case; and

WHEREAS, Roena attended four different schools by the time she reached fifth grade; in eighth grade, she transferred to Southern University Laboratory School with her older siblings and joined the cheerleading and track teams; she remained at the school until her graduation in 1967, having been the senior class parliamentarian; and

WHEREAS, despite receiving an offer to study at Ithaca College in New York, Roena chose to enroll at Southern University and A&M College; she majored in secondary education and was a member of several organizations, including the Kappa Delta Education Honors Society, Alpha Kappa Interdisciplinary Honors Society, and Association of Women Students; and

WHEREAS, Roena was initiated into the Beta Psi Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., in 1969, and she served as the chapter president in 1970; she also served as the 2nd National Vice President of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., which is the highest office held by an undergraduate in the organization; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Wilford became Southern University's first-ever female Student Government Association president and served for the 1970-1971 school year; during her tenure, she introduced the school's first student loan program, and her administration was the first to give Miss Southern a \$200 stipend; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Wilford graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree in secondary education from Southern University on May 31, 1971; after graduating, she began a contract with the East Baton Rouge Public School System; she also enrolled at Louisiana State University and completed a master of arts degree in curriculum instruction with an education specialty; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Wilford was employed at Baton Rouge Magnet High School, where she taught physics, math, and a course entitled "Man Made World" from August 1971 until May 1972; she then worked for the Louisiana Equal Educational Opportunity Department for three-and-a-half years before moving to Boston, Massachusetts, where she served as coordinator of the Lena Parks Corporation; and

WHEREAS, on February 16, 1980, Roena chartered the Nu Gamma Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., in the Baton Rouge community; and

WHEREAS, Roena moved to Louisville, Kentucky, where she worked as a personnel supervisor for Capital Holding Corporation of Louisville; she also volunteered with the Girl Scouts of Kentucky and attended First Baptist Church of Jeffersontown, where she taught preschool Sunday school, served as an assistant chaplain for one of the church choirs, taught a youth church doctrine class, and chaired the youth social activity committee; she was also selected as the 1981 Outstanding Woman of the Year for her work in both Baton Rouge and Louisville; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Wilford returned to Baton Rouge in 1983 and began working at Southern University, where she served as a physics instructor until her health-required retirement in 2004; after retiring, she continued her community service by remaining actively involved in Girl Scouts, Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, and the Nu Gamma Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.; she also volunteered at Winbourne Elementary School, and her dedication as an East Baton Rouge Parish volunteer earned her community-wide recognition; and

WHEREAS, Roena Isabelle Wilford passed away on Wednesday, April 2, 2025, leaving behind a rich legacy of service, love, dedication, and excellence; she leaves to cherish her beautiful memory her brother Johnny Wilford (Cookie); goddaughters, Juanita Waldron (Basil), Shundale Dennis (Page), and Tiera Armwood (Dennis); dedicated friends, Janice Drake, Eleanora Kirkendoll-Harris, Dorothy Gilliam, and Margee Ford; Girl Scout Service Unit 120; the Nu Gamma Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.; the Southern University and A&M College family; and a host of nieces, nephews, and cousins; she will be deeply missed, but the legacy of her love and compassion shall live on in perpetuity in the hearts and minds of those who were privileged enough to have known her.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Representatives of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby express heartfelt condolences on the death of Roena Isabelle Wilford; does hereby recognize her incredible lifelong dedication to community service; and does hereby extend sincerest wishes that her family, friends, and loved ones find comfort in their shared memories of her beautiful life.

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES